



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **BLACK PUBLIC MEDIA AWARDS \$410,000 TO CREATIVES AT PITCHBLACK AWARDS**

**NEW YORK (April 12, 2021)** — Black Public Media (BPM) awarded its highest-ever total funding to five teams competing at its PitchBLACK Forum, an interactive pitching competition before public television and commercial distributors and funders. The creatives received \$410,000 in funding for their productions at the PitchBLACK Awards on Friday, closing out the fourth edition of BPM’s intensive 360 Incubator+ fellowship, a holistic professional development program designed to help bring quality Black content to market. The event was hosted by BPM Executive Director Leslie Fields-Cruz and keynoted by noted producer Colin “Topper” Carew.

Fields-Cruz spoke about how the organization’s Founding Executive Director Mabel Haddock championed the opportunity that public media provides to amplify Black narratives, and Fields-Cruz implored attendees and supporters — which include Netflix, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), PBS, Sundance, the Ford Foundation, Viacom, TV One, the Southern Documentary Fund and more — to ensure that they see the light of day. “We have to ensure that our makers have the money and resources to tell those stories, and so, in some ways, it is on all of us to support and engage and bring them up and out into the world,” she said.

Five creative teams that participated in the incubator since January received funding, announced by BPM Director of Program Initiatives Denise Greene and 360 Incubator+ Creative Consultant Sandra Rattley. Awarded \$100,000 each were feature documentaries *Higher 15*, by Ameha Molla and Rajal Pitroda (about a former Ethiopian revolutionary, turned lead witness in an FBI investigation against his murderous prison guard in war torn Addis Ababa); and *Storming Caesars Palace*, by Hazel Gurland-Pooler and Naz Habtezghi (about Ruby Duncan, a co-founder of the National Welfare Rights Organization, who launched an extraordinary grassroots movement for economic justice, a universal basic income and Black women’s empowerment).

Awarded \$75,000 each was *Listen to Me*, by Stephanie Etienne and Kanika Harris (which captures the pregnancy and postpartum journeys of four Black women in the U.S., where Black women are at high risk for complications from pregnancy and childbirth); and *What’s in a Name?*, by Malkia Lydia and Khalil Munir (which follows Munir, a performance artist, as he examines his bittersweet South Philadelphia upbringing and the names and legacies he’s inherited from previous generations of Black men).

*Inner Wound Real*, by Carrie Hawk, scored \$60,000 in funding for the animated digital short about three BIPOC individuals who used to self-injure but now find creative ways to cope.

PitchBLACK judges were VIACOM/CBS Vice President of Original Documentaries Pamela A. Aguilar, Maryland Public Television Senior Vice President and Chief Content Officer Travis Mitchell and award-winning broadcaster and executive producer Donald Thoms.

The PitchBLACK Awards also celebrates Black media pioneers and voices of the future. This year’s BPM Trailblazer Award was presented to Marco Williams, for his decades of work primarily in public media, as a producer, director, writer and editor and for his commitment to mentoring the next generation of directors. The Emmy nominee and Peabody Award winner is currently working on a documentary with

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Stanley Nelson on the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921, scheduled to broadcast on the History Channel this May on the centennial of the tragedy.

Creative technologist Josie V. Williams was tapped for the second Nonso Christian Ugbo Digital Media Fellowship, an honor named after BPM's late director of digital initiatives, designed to acknowledge young makers in digital media. Support for the NCU Fellowship is provided by the Tarver Walls Foundation.

The 360 Incubator+ and PitchBLACK are funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Netflix, PBS, the MacArthur Foundation, Acton Family Giving, the New York State Council on the Arts, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and SHIFT online collaboration platform for media creatives.

For more information on BPM, visit the website [blackpublicmedia.org](https://blackpublicmedia.org), and follow the organization on social media at @blackpublicmedia on Instagram and Facebook and @BLKPublicMedia on Twitter.

### **ABOUT THE FELLOWS AND THEIR PROJECTS:**

<https://langhummitcell.com/bmpmb/>

### **ABOUT MARCO WILLIAMS:**

**Marco Williams** is an award-winning director who has been creating films and telling impactful stories for a long time. He has received three nominations for the Sundance Film Festival Grand Jury Prize: Documentary.

His credits include: *Crafting an Echo*, *Tell Them We Are Rising: The Story of Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, *Lonnie Holley: The Truth of the Dirt*, *The Black Fives*, *The Undocumented*, *Inside the New Black Panthers*; *Banished*; *Freedom Summer*; *I Sit Where I Want: The Legacy of Brown v. Board of Education*; *MLK Boulevard: The Concrete Dream*; *Two Towns of Jasper*; *Making Peace: Rebuilding Our Communities*; *Declarations: The Spiritual Deficit and The American Dream*; *Without a Pass*; *In Search of Our Fathers*; and *From Harlem to Harvard*.

### **ABOUT JOSIE V. WILLIAMS:**

**Josie V. Williams** is a creative technologist and afro-nowist focused on the intersection of technology, art and culture. Josie is the founder of Algorithmic Equity, an interactive digital platform that empowers any New Yorker to report, record, or respond to law enforcement behavior. She is currently on the Creative Science track at NEW INC, an incubator out of NYC's New Museum. She has presented her research on bias in chronic kidney disease prediction modeling at Fair ML (machine learning) for Health's NeurIPS (Neural Information Processing Systems) workshop in Vancouver, Canada, and at NYC Media Lab's Summit in 2019. Her primary interests are artificial intelligence, algorithmic equity, cultivating Black radical imagination, and creating sentient-centered AI. Her projects revolve around chatbots modeled after historically significant BIPOC leaders and the use of biometrics for mass surveillance.

### **ABOUT BLACK PUBLIC MEDIA:**

**Black Public Media** (BPM) is committed to enriching our democracy by educating, enlightening, empowering and engaging the American public about the Black experience. Founded in 1979, the nonprofit pursues its mission by developing, producing and distributing innovative Black media

content through public media outlets and by investing in visionary Black content makers. For more information, visit [blackpublicmedia.org](http://blackpublicmedia.org).

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